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Know your Bristol

How well do you know your neighbourhood? I mean how well do you really know it: the history of its buildings, and communities, its atmosphere, its aspirations and its excitements? The answer in many cases is, well, frankly not very well at all; but in many other cases, you actually know a great deal, more than you think, probably much more than anybody else.

You know different things than your neighbours do, because they are more recent arrivals; you know what the academics cannot know, because it is not recorded in the local archives or the press. You know about districts you have moved away from, and about those you still live in; you know about personalities, incidents, celebrations and disasters.

“In Bristol, wherever you went to in the early years in Bristol, factories all had an odour. So you would smell the spice factory for instance at Kingswood, the boot factory at Staple Hill, you’d smell where they made the clothes, you’d smell where they made the leather and the tannery. And the tanneries were really potent, they were. And you’d always smell Carwardine’s, for instance, which used to grind the coffee beans; oh and when you got to that, you thought you were in wonderful-land. So Bristol was full of smells.”

Mike Earley recalls the smells of Bristol in the 1950s and 60s

Joining up those with such local knowledge and those with questions about it, and celebrating the power of memory, and the intense interest in the city’s past of Bristolians - born and adoptive - is the aim of our Know your Bristol initiative, which was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

In this booklet we showcase a fraction of the material offered to us by visitors to our seven road shows, where we worked in collaboration with Bristol City Council, to encourage the sharing of memories, photographs, and documents, as well as souvenirs, maps, medals, and other artefacts. Along you came, patiently

recalling decades of Bristol’s unwritten history, donating photographs and anecdotes that are now in many cases already lodged on the Know Your Place website, sharing your knowledge of our city’s history with others.

We are immensely grateful to the generous participants at our road shows who happily sat and answered our questions, and to those who came to support us with materials, or kind words and their interest in the project. The lasting legacy of this work certainly resides in the much-augmented website, and the materials now lodged permanently in the City records. We hope, too, that it resides in new or strengthened partnerships with the local groups and institutions who worked with us on the events.

Robert Bickers, Professor of History and Know your Bristol lead



Know your Place

Know Your Place, which launched in March 2011, is an innovative web-based tool intended to engage local communities in the story of their neighbourhoods. Created by Bristol City Council and working with local communities, the aim of the tool is to enable people to access a wide range of historic archive material and use this to inform decisions about planning at the neighbourhood scale.

The website allows users to overlay various historic maps - some as early as 1750 - that have been scanned from the city archive collections. This is particularly engaging when using the novel spyglass tool in the enhanced version of the site. The intuitive, map based interface enables a detailed understanding about how Bristol has developed as well as providing access to a range of other archive sources such as images from the Braikenridge Collection of historic paintings held at Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery.

A key aspect of the website is to enable communities to upload locally sourced and personal archive material so that people can begin to tell their own neighbourhood stories and identify the places that they value. As such it is developing a new collaborative approach to developing an understanding of the historic environment that utilises the strengths of specialist and local knowledge. Know Your Place is already being used in schools and will be one of the key vehicles for delivering the Bristol Curriculum initiative that will create a locally relevant learning resource for Bristol.

“I was taken one day to an office, and I thought to myself ‘that’s the Headmaster’s office, I wonder what trouble I’m in now?’ and he said ‘No problem, no problem at all, this is the lost property office as well. You’re the only one in the school without school uniform - what is the reason for it?’. And I said ‘Well, my parents can’t afford school uniform’ and that was it. And I walked out of that office, I was completely dressed - cap, blazer, tie, shirt, trousers and shoes - walked out the office like everybody else and I was made up for the day.”

Basil Clarke talks about his memories of Lockleaze School in the 1950s and 60s



Know your Bristol is the result of one of the new partnerships that has developed as a result of the potential of this web resource to connect people and their stories to the history of the city.

Know Your Place can be accessed at www.bristol.gov.uk/knowyourplace. It was created by Peter Insole in Bristol City Council’s City Design Group in partnership with Andrew Venham of the Council’s Corporate GIS team and part funded by English Heritage.

Know your Hillfields

Hillfields is an inter-war housing estate that contains some of the earliest council housing in Bristol. Initially based on the concept of 'Homes for Heroes' that followed the First World War, Hillfields was a designed neighbourhood built on farmland at the edge of Bristol. Along with the housing, new shops, schools and places of work such as the Robinson Paper and Card Factory were built for the residents.

“I wasn't frightened about the bombs, or the war, or nothing – I was only nine. But what I didn't like was the bloody big spiders that used to be down there, great big garden spiders. Of course, you had your beds made up and all down there...”

Ken Pearce recalls his experiences of the air raid shelters at Quadrant West during the Second World War



“We used to go up to what we would call The Green, which is Market Square – the bit of grass in the middle of Hillfields Avenue. We'd play football, cricket, tennis, anything and Mum would come and call me in when it got dark. There used to be 20 or 30 of us up there just playing football, until you couldn't see each other anymore.”

Lindsay Passco remembers evenings spent on Market Square during the 1980s

“Oh yes, the Fishponds station. I had a great affection, well what it was – it's no longer there – because I used to take down the baby in the pram (I used to love making little clothes for the dolls I had). So I used to take my sewing stuff down and sat on the station; I used to do a little bit of sewing and watch the trains come in. I don't know what they ever thought!”

Freda Brown recalling memories of Fishponds station, which was closed in 1966

Know your Hillfields took place at Hillfields Library which had created its own display from an archive of photographs showing past events at the community centre and youth club. These images helped to encourage visitors to the library to share their own memories of growing up on the estate.

Over the course of the day approximately 40 local residents shared their personal archives and memories with the Know your Bristol team. Images dating back to the earliest days of the estate showed children at play on the recreation ground, class photos and VE Day street parties.

We also listened to and recorded stories about going to the local schools, working at the local shops and factories as well as wartime memories of bombing and air raid shelters. As visitors to the event shared their memories with the Know your Bristol team and each other we learnt that in the early years often families of up to 10 people occupied a single semi-detached house on the estate, usually only one person if anyone in the street owned a motor car and that going to the local dance or cinema was the highlight of the week.

As a result of Know your Hillfields a wealth of images and oral histories were added to Know Your Place in an area where previously there had been little or no content.



Know your Zoo

Bristol Zoo is the world's oldest provincial zoo and has played a significant part in locals' conceptions of Bristol and their identification with and love of the city. It was therefore a natural place for us to invite Bristolians, and people from further afield, to come and share their fond memories of visits over the years. Bristol Zoo is also keen to explore its heritage; as such, the

Know your Bristol team were joined by three members of staff and two postgraduate students from the University of Bristol who are researching the animal and social histories of the Zoo. The students had put together display boards featuring rarely seen photos of the Zoo through the ages, while historic film footage of the Zoo ran in the background.

The day got off to a notable start, with a visit from the Right Honourable Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress, Geoffrey and Bernice Gollop. As Bristolians born and bred, both had some wonderful tales to relate about their experiences at the Zoo - including the monkey temple, the polar bears and Rosie the elephant. All the stories we received on the day added a personal element to the Zoo's history and emphasised just how much it has been a cherished place in Bristol.

Memories and photographs stretched back to the 1930s and included people involved with the Zoo in a variety of capacities: a keeper's daughter, a first aid volunteer, and a former veterinary school student, as well as happy visitors. The day unearthed stories about a keeper's practical jokes including leaving some painters stranded on the roof of a gorilla cage and pulling the lion's tail, as well as hints about the notorious rumours of an unofficial car park attendant. The family snapshots, historic souvenirs, and personal interviews will be of great value to future researchers, as well as providing an insight into this historic zoo.

“And it was something that always stayed in your mind, even then the place almost felt like it was going back in time because it had that sort of traditional feel to it. So you'd come in and all the pristine flowers, and people wandering around looking at the flowers as much as the animals was something that did make it a unique place to visit.”

Geoffrey Gollop remembers another side of trips to the zoo

“His claim to fame while working at the zoo was that he had been knocked down by a dead giraffe. It happened as he was going into work. He walked into the side entrance up on the main road, some of the keepers were hoisting up the giraffe by the feet and as the head left the ground it swung round and knocked him right off his feet.”

Sue Gallop talks about her grandfather William Frank White, a zoo keeper in the 1940-50s



Hilary Cross at the Zoo circa 1953

Know your Arnos Vale

Researching history often involves exploring the lives of people who are no longer with us and trying to piece together their story. In Bristol, nowhere is the diversity of those who came before us more apparent than at Arnos Vale Cemetery - the setting for our third event.

Arnos Vale is one of the earliest and most important working Victorian cemeteries in the UK. It is now the resting place for more than 300,000 people, from Lord Mayors to the city's paupers, industrialists, merchants, railway workers and social reformers - not to mention much missed friends and family members. It is hugely significant for Bristolians as a place of remembrance, a site of local heritage and historic importance, and a very special and much loved landscape.

The tranquillity of Arnos Vale proved to be a perfect setting for people to relax with a cup of tea and recount their memories whilst a jazz trio played in the background. We also had support from an archaeology postgraduate student at the University who is researching the cemetery; she was able to talk people through the cemetery's design and layout as well as answer questions about old photographs.

Stories from the day were often personal and moving accounts of loved ones buried at Arnos Vale, including a Bristolian family coming in with their entire family tree laid out. Petrina Pope told us stories from her family's history, including that of her relative who tragically died falling out of a gig whilst trying to rescue a dog. Other memories focused on less sombre occasions picking cowslips and bluebells whilst walking through the cemetery, and a crowd of thousands who gathered to remember the life of a local cricket player. We also gained an insight into the working of the cemetery as Christine Mitchell described the duties of her father, a grave digger, as well as the ritual of caring for the family grave. Listening to all the stories brought along gave us a wonderful reminder of the valuable contributions people's memories can make to the local history and understanding of Bristol.

“Poor old John, he was out with his wife in a gig, with friends somewhere, and the little dog that was with them jumped out of the gig and went under the horse's hoofs, John bent over to rescue the dog and fell out, landing on his head. They took him to the Masons Arms in Stapleton and he died there overnight”

Petrina Pope telling the story of her relative John Cole in the mid 1800s

“When it was 20 minutes before darkness he would ring a bell, like a school bell. And I've rung that bell because I've come up, you know, to meet him and he'd be dressed up in a suit and a tie and a trilby. And I've rung that bell and that gives people 20 minutes, wherever they are, to finish what they're doing and come down, otherwise the gates get locked and they're locked in.”

Christine Mitchell talking about her father who was a grave digger at Arnos Vale

“There was always the looking at the angels, looking at the old graves, there was always romance about it. I wasn't disturbed as a child at the thought of walking through the graveyard. I think I enjoyed the quietness and I still enjoy walking through it as I have today.”

Christine Miller remembers walking through Arnos Vale as a child in the 1950s



Know your Kings Weston

Peering through the windows on walks through the house, the Kings Weston House can sometimes seem remote and distant: going out into the garden outside and in, but not really alive. However, not only is the house a Vanbrugh-designed house with scores of visitors on the grounds, it has also repopulated the entire building and its grounds with life in the past. We had thought we might encounter the historical house within the area that had perhaps been closed off from the public.

Peering through the windows on walks through the grounds, Kings Weston House can sometimes seem remote and distant: gorgeously renovated outside and in, but not really alive. However, not only did we fill this Vanbrugh-designed house with scores of visitors on a rainy Saturday, we also repopulated the entire building and its grounds with the memories of its past. We had thought we might encounter the history of the house as a site within the area that had perhaps been closed off from the public as a private estate, a police training college, or a more recent site of recreation. And almost our first chat was with a gentleman who announced that he had first visited the grounds in about 1930 with his school, for a sports-day. It was a closed off site otherwise, he told me, except on Mother's Day, when Philip Napier Miles, who then owned it, allowed local children in to pick flowers.

But we had not realised that the house had, in its turn, later been a school itself, from 1950-62, and we filled the house with those school children. Our day was co-organised with the Kings Weston Action Group (KWAG), and with the generous and enthusiastic support of John Hardy, its owner. We hoped to find new material about its grounds, and in trooped descendants of the gardening staff and the family who owned a neighbouring farm, and others with fantastic stories to tell and material to share.

Sir John Vanbrugh himself presided, as KWAG's David Martyn had come complete with wig, and a recreation of the statue of Hercules that once stood in front of the building - but is now in the grounds of Goldney House - was also present, guiding visitors into the display room. But the school children took over. Some re-encountered each other for the first time in decades. They chatted for hours, and they re-configured the very rooms we talked in. The tiles in the hall will never be seen in the same light again, for we learned that at morning assembly each child had to stand on one of the regularly spaced black ones. Back into the building came its desks and teachers, and back on to the trees outside swung the ghosts of children at playtime.

“We used to, almost daily I think, used to go on nature walks around this area, up through to the Echo and down through the avenue of trees and back up through... there’s a large avenue of trees that comes up through here. And we might have to go out and find different types of mosses, we might have to find different types of leaves and that type of thing, different insects were pointed out to us.”

Pete Evans describes lessons at Kings Weston House School in the 1940s-50s

“And it had wires going to all parts of the store and I don’t know how it worked, but the person who took your money - the sales girl - would put the money in a... I think it was wooden container, screw it on this wire thing, pull a handle that would shoot over through to the central cashier and she would sort out the money and give the change and whizz it back.”

Gil Osman remembers the food store in Shirehampton



Know your Lockleaze

Lockleaze is a housing estate built during the late 1940s and early 1950s in response to the shortage of housing across Bristol. It is currently part of a pilot scheme which helps local groups identify how their local area should change in the future. Know your Lockleaze, which took place in the Cameron Centre, created an ideal opportunity to encourage the community to share their stories and contribute to this process.

Prior to the event, the Know your Bristol team had been in contact with Ian Hadrell who has written two books on the history of Lockleaze and has an extensive archive of material. Ian brought some of this material with him on the day, including many scanned images from the 1950s and helped generate conversation about the area.

Both past and present residents came to share their memories with us. Many of the stories were told by people who had moved to the area when the first houses were built. At that time there were no facilities on the estate. The shops on Gainsborough Square were built later and one story recounted how local residents built the first community centre themselves out of an old army hut.

Other stories revealed how important the local school and groups like the Boys' Brigade and the Dings rugby club were in creating a sense of community in the 1950s. The brigade, rugby club and football club were based at the Shaftesbury Crusade, the main community building in Lockleaze. The Crusade was also used for religious meetings before any churches were built in Lockleaze and film shows at the Friday Night Club.

“When television first came in, we were one of the first to have television; there was two - the Peddlers in no. 3 - and us in no. 8. My younger brother and I, we never had so many friends - everyone always wanted to come over. My Dad used to come home for tea after work and he'd have a job getting in the room there were so many kids watching Roy Rogers or someone like that y'know.”

Clive Bull recalls his days as a youth living in Haydon Gardens

“There was a Friday night club which used to be the film show... It was thruppence to go in and if you didn't have thruppence and you turned up, they'd let you in anyway - no problem.”

“On a Wednesday night, once a week, pay sixpence and they'd have a film show, y'know, a proper film. That was good because as I say, there were no televisions then. You could take the family down and that was a good night out for us.”

Basil and Ivy Clarke talk about the local cinema, the Shaftesbury Crusade

“When we first moved up there, they used to have what was then called a 'squatter's camp', which was an old army camp. We used to play up there as kids when the army moved out, but they then moved in the people that were bombed out during the war into these huts and that's why it was called the squatter's camp.”

Clive Bull remembers the ex-army camp on Purdown



Know your South Bristol

South Bristol's neighbourhoods are rich in heritage: Mesolithic flint scatters, Iron Age metalworking, Roman settlements, medieval manors, pilgrimage routes, estates funded through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, heavy industry, the utopian visions of twentieth-century housing estates, and the material culture of migrating communities. While some of this heritage remains underground, much of it is all around us - visible, if we know where and how to look for it. Know your South Bristol, hosted by Knowle West Media Centre, aimed to capture some of this heritage through the memories of those living in the area.

“The vicarage, Mr Johnson's vicarage, used to have this lemonade machine and it was a great big contraption like a robot thing. And he used to have this great big box of little... stubby little bottles and used to have this canister thing and there was little tablets in there and they were two different colours. And this machine it had, obviously it put bubbles into the water, so you had to get the bottle, put one tablet in, and get it like this and go [makes machine noise] and it used to come out with the bubbles in and then you used to have to put a little stopper in it.”

Pat Hall recalls making lemonade in the vicarage.

“And he gave us, well he gave me, when I started work, he gave me a lovely reference. He gave us all references, in those days you had to get a reference from your church.”

Mavis Barnes remembers the vicar, Mr Johnson

For this event, we invited people to bring along home movies and slides, in addition to family photographs and artefacts. These provide fascinating evidence of the rapidly changing landscapes of South Bristol over the past century and of the ways in which people have viewed those landscapes. In addition to the oral histories and digitisation equipment of the previous events, we also set up Super8 and slide projectors and VHS and DVD players for people to share their moving image collections. A number of community groups supported the day by contributing their knowledge and expertise, working with other visitors to help them discover their own 'media archaeologies'. A further important aim of the day was to bring different South Bristol communities together. Ashton Vale, Bedminster, Brislington, Knowle West and Stockwood were all represented and Know your South Bristol saw new friendships start and old friendships rekindle.

Pat Hall, Mavis Barnes and Shirley Pearson were in the St Barnabas Church Girls hockey team. Well-known Knowle photographer George Gallop photographed the team in 1952 and that photograph was used for the poster advertising the Know your South Bristol event. Mrs Hall, Mrs Barnes and Mrs Pearson no longer live in Knowle West but they spotted the poster and decided to come along. Mrs Pearson said 'it was a lovely event as it brought back a lot of memories and got you talking about all kinds of things'. Their story shows that it is not just historical buildings and events that make up Bristol's history, but also the smaller, more personal stories that Know your Bristol has focused on collecting, which are just as fascinating and important to understanding and exploring community history and preserving local heritage. Those personal stories are bound up with the ways in which we make place. Church picnics, hockey games, family gatherings in back gardens, local parades, even birthday parties that end in tears - these are the events that communities photograph and film and those images are invaluable records of the ways in which we live our lives together in an ever-changing built environment.



Know your Bristol

In the last event in the Know your Bristol calendar we turned to look not only at photographs, but at ‘things’ and personal possessions more generally. We asked people across the whole of the city to bring along objects that had a particular meaning for them, and that in some way summed up their own individual histories of Bristol.

“Roy didn’t have that much stage presence; he just stood there and sang. But you listened when Roy sang, I mean he had such an amazing voice and that is probably what I liked – to see somebody like that, once in a lifetime I think!”

Eileen Sparling talks about going to see Roy Orbison at Colston Hall in the 1970s

“So a group of his friends got together and told him he must stop and give a thought to his deprived wife and family. This he promised to do and gave up horse racing but immediately bought a pack of hounds which cost 10 shillings a week each to keep even in those days so his family was even worse off.”

Alice Ouvry tells the story of her great great grandfather

This event was held at the M Shed museum in the city centre. Since opening in 2011, the M Shed has become well known among Bristolians for its lively retelling of the city’s past. Personal stories and physical objects are absolutely central to the museum’s mission, so it seemed the ideal place to wrap up the series. Two curators from the museum were on hand to discuss people’s artefacts and advise on their preservation, and our fantastic volunteers were placed around the museum, ready to demonstrate the Know Your Place website.

This day was full of surprises, and resulted in our most eclectic selection of objects yet. Alice Ouvry brought in a Victorian dog collar, which revealed the dashing pre-history of the now defunct Southville Hotel. Her great great grandfather, a flamboyant character to say the least, had lived there with his pack of hounds.

Derek Carr, a former HTV employee, brought in the newsroom clock, redolent of all the drama and excitement of live television. Eileen Sparling shared with us her collection of concert programmes from the Colston Hall in the 1970s.

One of the most poignant collections was Keith Nickliss’s memorabilia from his grandfather’s experience in the First World War. George Victor Brace had been a stretcher bearer, and his grandson showed us his armband and even a piece of shrapnel which had become embedded in his leg. This collection also included a very well preserved autograph book, put together by Florence Weaver, who was to become Victor’s wife. Florence’s friends and relations had written messages and poems. Victor himself wrote in October 1915: ‘Tho many miles divide us/Your face I cannot see/Remember it was I who wrote/These last few lines to thee.’ Leafing through the pages was a very touching experience, and also a thought-provoking one. Was this 100-year-old collection of jokes and expressions of friendship so very different from today’s Facebook pages?



Public engagement at the University of Bristol



“We were sent up to Penpole where there was an old army... Canadian, I think it was Canadian army camp. And that became our school - an army camp. So that prepared me well for the army. Because the army huts... when I was doing my basic training near Aldershot, they were exactly the same as our classroom huts.”

Gil Osman recounts his memories of Portway Secondary School

Engaging the public is a vital part of life at the University of Bristol and an area in which staff and students are actively involved. It is integral to research and teaching that is grounded in societal need and is engaged with society's interests, concerns, priorities and aspirations. The Centre for Public Engagement supports and promotes public engagement with research and teaching across the University. This involves running programmes of public talks and festivals, helping staff and students to engage different audiences, providing appropriate training and facilitating collaboration with partners outside the University.

The University is keenly interested in working with local communities, as this project has demonstrated, and we are always looking for ways in which to develop new partnerships, and projects, which can build on our own strengths and match them with the strengths and interests of local partners. The Centre for Public Engagement provides one point of contact for those developing projects, but many ideas grow out of individual approaches made directly to researchers at the University as well. Nationally, the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement is also able to help potential partners find each other.



Know your Bristol has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of the cross-Research Council Connected Communities programme. Connected Communities aims to understand the changing nature of communities and community values, in their historical and cultural contexts, and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life.

Know your Bristol Partners



Know your Bristol is a collaboration between the University of Bristol and Bristol City Council, with support from the following partners:

Arnos Vale Trust

Brislington Brook Project

Brislington Community Archaeology Project

Brislington Community Partnership

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Bristol Zoo Gardens

Friends of Arnos Vale

Greater Bedminster Community Partnership

Greater Fishponds Neighbourhood Partnership

Kings Weston Action Group

Knowle West Media Centre

Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust

Reflex Camera Club

The team regrets to have to record the sad death of Tim Denning, co-founder of Kings Weston Action Group, who worked with us on Know your Kings Weston.

Know your Bristol team:

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Peter Insole

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Kate Miller

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